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The lighthouse is perched in a precarious cliff-side position

An iconic cliff-top lighthouse damaged in Christchurch's quakes will be salvaged today by the Department of Conservation in a daring operation involving a helicopter and professional abseilers.

DOC project manager Grant Campbell says the historical Godley Head lighthouse was "left clinging to the cliff and had an extremely lucky escape".

"The complicated operation has required some fairly creative thinking and enthusiasm."

Abseilers will descend 50m down the cliff face to remove the copper dome and outer glass housing, and a helicopter will transport the unit to a nearby DOC compound.

The prism glass, prism housing and light mechanism will also be securely crated

and flown there.

Mr Campbell says the structure and operating mechanisms are of "significant historic importance" and DOC is pleased to be able to save another piece of Christchurch's heritage.

The lighthouse and keepers' dwelling, built in 1865 from locally quarried stone, was handed over to DOC for possible removal after being damaged in the earthquake.

During the Second World War, fortifications were built around the lighthouse and a battery of six-inch guns was installed, due to its strategic vantage point.

As the lighthouse was in the direct line of fire of the guns, the old tower and lighthouse keepers' cottage was demolished and the lighthouse moved further down the cliff face.

The lantern house will be kept in safe storage until it can be restored on a new concrete base.

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